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THE NIGHT OF THE GODS. An Inquiry into Cosmic and Cosmogonic Mythology and Symbolism. By JOHN O'NEILL. Vol. ii. London: David Nutt. 1897. Pp. xii, 583-1077.

The first volume of this remarkable work has been reviewed in this Journal, to which Mr. O'Neill was a contributor, and which, as is satisfactory to recollect, was among the first to recognize his labors. The second volume, now before us, is given from his notes in the form of an imperfect sketch containing a vast quantity of useful material. In a touching preface, the wife whose devotion has succeeded in completing this memorial returns thanks to the friends whose aid has made possible the publication. A brief Memoir, contributed by a brother-in-law, gives an interesting notice of the career of the author. An official in a public department, the faithfulness and talents of Mr. O'Neill were rewarded by employment on responsible missions. After the acquisition of Cyprus in 1878, it was his administrative ability which brought order out of the chaos into which had fallen the currency of the island. In 1869, when a contributor to the "Pall Mall Gazette," he was struck by the rich field open in Japanese literature and folk-lore, and undertook the acquisition of that language, of which he printed an elementary manual for the use of students. After leaving Cyprus, and while during many years a resident in France, he was a diligent student of mediæval literature. The results of inquiries into the patois of the Free Companies were embodied in a disquisition on "Li Roys des Ribauds." While engaged in these researches, he was led to the mythological investigations lately terminated by a sudden death.

In an account of the earlier volume has been noted the central idea of Mr. O'Neill's discussion; namely, the place in human thought to be assigned to the revolution of the firmament. In the continuation, the subject is further illustrated by parallels and suggestions from all quarters. Testimony from China and Japan is given side by side with that from ancient India and Persia, classic antiquity, the European Middle Age, modern folk-lore, and, in less compass, American and Australian aboriginal material. The titles of the chapters exhibit the diversity of their contents. Under the head of "Heaven's Myths," we have discussions on "The Wheel" (including the Praying-wheel, Fire-wheel, Wheel of Fortune, Wreath, Rose); "Buddha's Footprint" (mentioning Shoes of Swiftness, Chakra, Swastika, Labyrinth, Doric Fret, Conch); "Dancing" (referring to Circular worship, Right and Left, Religious dancing); "The Sphere" (The Winged Sphere, Man-bird-god, Feathers, Egg). Other main divisions are, "Some Heaven's Gods," "Polar Myths," "Universe-axis Myths."

The book contains numerous new interpretations and conjectures respecting the meaning of mythologic signs and tales; thus, to the mind of the author, the symbol of the wheel is not to be explained as a solar emblem, but, more mystically, from the conception of celestial motion. It is observed that the "praying-wheels" of Thibetian Buddhists are in reality meditation-wheels, containing sentences intended to assist the worshipper in conceiving the vanity of created existence; the revolution is to be explained in connection with the ceremonial circuit about shrines and holy trees. The

wheel symbol, rather than the sun disk, is considered to be the root of the sign in the Babylonian Sun-god tablet. The Wheel of Fortune, employed for divination, has the same origin. In the rose windows of Christian churches, thinks the writer, we have again an example of the prevalence of the circle symbolizing the heavens. The footprints of Buddha are to be taken not so much in the sense of material homage as growing out of a more spiritual notion. The heraldic device of the "Legs o' Man" (the island) is to be connected with the Three Steps of Vishnu. The swastika is also derived from the heavenly circle. Religious dancing and the ceremonial circuit are imitations of celestial motions.

As particularly instructive chapters may be noted those on the "Heaven-River," in which the author remarks the Chinese conception of the Milky Way as the source of the Hoang-Ho, and "The Mountain," in which the position which heights have in religious philosophy is well set forth. Mr. O'Neill observes that he has found this portion of his inquiry unsatisfactory on account of the difficulty of distinguishing between the peak which carries the firmament and the firmament itself; he seems inclined to explain this confusion as the result of a partial loss of the original idea. It may, however, be remarked that, according to a Japanese informant, and to the testimony of verses expounded by him, the modern inhabitant of China and Japan still makes scarce any separation between the mountain and the sky, as in the case of the classic Olympus.

Most readers, while finding in the book that which most interests an inquirer, an abundance of information, will be inclined to believe that the thesis is carried too far. On the other hand, it cannot be questioned that Mr. O'Neill has done a service by calling attention to a neglected phase of primitive thought. As in all such cases, the only way of insuring certainty is a resort to living tradition. When we understand exactly the extent to which the rotation of the heaven about its axis has attracted the attention of the savage races of the present day, we shall know how far that observation figured in the construction of ancient mythologies. The star-lore of American Indians is as yet very imperfectly studied, and no attention has been paid to the part which the daily revolution of the firmament plays in their system of ideas. Investigators who are concerned in bringing out the true state of the case, in this as in other researches, are therefore equally engaged in the elucidation of Vedic and Greek mythology, as well as of the obscure problems of the significance of symbols.

*W. W. N.*